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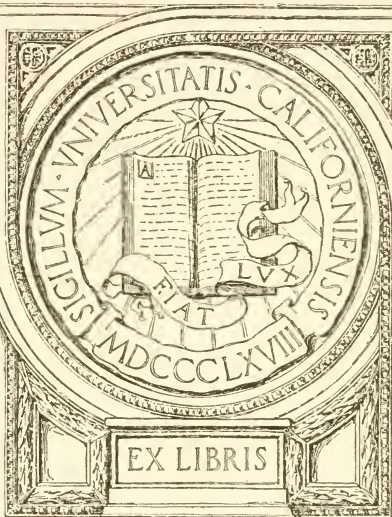
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The Promise of Life



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The Promise of Life

By

Howard Sutherland

*Author of "Idylls of Greece," "The
Woman Who Could," "The Le-
gend of Love," "Idas and
Marpessa," "Out of
the North."*

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In Memory
of
A Friend

The Promise of Life

THESE are days of stress and of endeavor, when in the pursuit of the material, one is apt to forget that another life shall follow this as surely as night the day, gentler Spring the stern and uncompromising Winter.

Let there be no question in our minds as to this. Let us not permit the metaphysician to cloud the issue, nor the scientist to clothe it with doubt. Let us rather see with the clearer vision of the poet,

with the Shelleys, the Wordsworths, the Brownings of the world, to whom God has granted the Vision and who but act as His messengers in the revelation of divine Truth.

Not that the Truth needs revelation, being everywhere in evidence; but interpreters are ever necessary, for unless one's attention is called to such apparent splendors, the majority of us overlook the magnificence of the nightly display of stars.

To find fault with the modern tendency to strive for material success is futile. To desire the good things of life is only natural, and we must not overlook the fact that by bettering his own condition the individual very often improves that of

those around him. The progress of the individual means the progress of the race; and while certain of us may wish that the benefits to the many were more in evidence, and that poverty and unhappiness, injustice, and misunderstanding were no less things of the past than are the rack and the ordeal by fire, nevertheless in our hearts we know that the world is warmed as never before, by a sympathy of man for man.

And whereas in the past the Divine Intelligence saw fit to produce an à Kempis, a Saint Francis, a Loyola, whose unselfish lives flare like torches in the darkness of ignorance and superstition, so has that same Divine Intelligence created in the present those after-intelligences

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

by whose efforts and accomplishments we of To-day and those of To-morrow shall benefit.

In their way, great inventions may be forms of praise, no less acceptable to God than the widow's silent prayer or the poet's hymn of gratitude. Having eyes that see not, this may not be clear to us—at least, not clear to us *now*; but to the mystic and the symbolist it may be otherwise:

We see the Garment, not the God within;
The deed, but not its inspiration.

Therefore, let those whose voices are raised against the so-called materialism of the day think twice before they wrap themselves in their convictions and pronounce as hopeless our spiritual progress.

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

Each of us is, or can become, a creator in his or her own way, and it is by our creative acts that we prove our unity with the Creator Himself. It is given to all people to think along lines other than those of the material; perhaps more so than we imagine. To us, the merchant may appear to spend too much time over his ledgers, the physician over the latest theories in his medical journals, and hundreds of thousands to gain their meager information from the news columns of their one daily paper. But who can see into the mind of another? And who, supposing the charges to be well founded, can say that such conditions shall always be? Already there are signs of gropings

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

toward Light, of the reaching up of hands for other than material assistance, of the public expression of thoughts and sentiments which, heretofore, have been withheld, or only whispered through fear of ridicule.

Therefore, although the statement that these are days of "stress and of endeavor" is in the main correct, we need have no fear that God has so entirely forgotten our world that in human hearts there is no yearning for Him. One can do one's work and yet be an agent in greater schemes than may at present be apparent to him; one may toil in a factory or sit in a counting house and yet be an Apostle of Joy, a factor for good in the plan whose

purpose is the ultimate perfection of all.

With the vision that is granted us we have assured ourselves of the progress of the world. An occasional setback, the flaming-up of human passions, with ensuing war and religious persecution here and there—what are these in comparison with the growth of Equality, a keener sense of Justice, a broader sympathy between man and man, and woman's use of opportunities too long withheld from her? Heretofore despairing humanity has had recourse to Revolution, from whose crimson fires the white flame of Liberty was born, and from whose hideous wreckage was slowly builded the marble palace fit for the children

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

of Freedom and of Peace. But Revolution is now no longer necessary; its place is taken by Quiet Change, in which, not despairing but enlightened and hopeful men have faith—men who have confidence that in changes slowly brought about Life still continues, under better and easier conditions.

Prophetic of this eternal growth, this kaleidoscopic replacement of the countless particles constituting the picture of Existence, and of the eternal supremacy and control over it of God, are Shelley's lines:

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly.
Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

Were we not inwardly conscious,
conscious above all necessity of

absolute proof, of this continuance of the One, then there might be grave doubt as to our own survival when the swift divorce of death has sundered our mortal from its immortal part. But we know that fundamentally we are good, despite our errors and our weaknesses, despite our follies and our boasts; and we know that God is good, despite the wrath with which our mistaken creeds have clothed Him and the vengeance we have supposed He would find delight in. And we know that as the magnet draws unto itself its affinities, so the Divine Good shall draw unto itself the Human Good, and that which is truly ourselves shall not be lost.

To this, he who attends us in our

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

sickness and who has well informed himself as to our body, may shake his head, saying: "My microscope gives me no proof thereof"; the metaphysician, no less helpless than the Sufis of old, may abstrusely discuss it and come to no satisfactory conclusion. But we know that the most learned doctors disagree among themselves and that the profoundest speculations of the metaphysicians are but idle words to the metaphysicians of other schools. Therefore, we more ordinary mortals, unlearned in knowledge which is inexact and which only unsettles, and glad of our possession of

The faith of childhood and its love,
may remain unshocked by their
conclusions, though wishful that they

could participate in our simpler and happier belief.

Surrounding the atom and the farthest star, the pulsing cell and the flaring nebula, is the Mystery which neither microscope nor telescope can adequately explain; behind the flower's illusive fragrance is something more illusive yet, that something which causes us to stand silent in the presence of breathless beauty or confronted by the wondrous serenity in the eyes of a little child.

This is nothing less than the Mystery of Life, the primal mystery and the ultimate. In the unthinking it raises but little wonder; in the scientific mind it awakens curiosity, but a curiosity which mere science

cannot satisfy; and from the metaphysician, as hopelessly confounded by it as was Napoleon by the engima of the Sphinx, it draws forth such papers as are delivered before Philosophical Societies, but which, when read, leave their hearers hopelessly befogged.

When confronted by this mystery, and confronted he is by it every hour of the day, the thoughtful man knows better than to seek its explanation. He may divine its intent, which is something very different; but beyond that he will not seek to go, informing and satisfying himself by intuition rather than by reasoning processes. And it is by reason of his inability or unwillingness to avail himself of these intuitions that

we have gradually come to consider our more materially-minded neighbor among the stumbling-blocks to spiritual progress to-day.

We know well how the scientific mind is apt to pooh-pooh this mystery, suggesting that in due time it shall be explained to the world; if not to the world's satisfaction, at least to the satisfaction of the scientific mind itself. But the pooh-poohing of men at such inexplicable things is as vain as the lashing of the sea against great rocks, as vain as the blowing of winds upon the stars.

In our acceptance of mysteries as mysteries, in our leaning to the poet's more optimistic utterance regarding that which we well know is outside

the pale of absolute proof, we do not dim the luster of the divine jewel of intelligence, divinest of gifts. Nay, by our acceptance of him as teacher we but act as do the midges attracted from the darkness by the sunbeam. For the true poet is the child of the ages. He is the inheritor of all memories, of the hopes and aspirations and longings of mankind. In him, self is lost in the race, whose representative he becomes; and above all else he is the mouthpiece of Divinity. And even though it be not permitted him to explain the mystery whereof we are speaking, in his song he still reminds men thereof and encourages the faint-hearted even when descends about them the forbidding

mist of death. With the experiences of the past within his heart he concerns himself only with the future, knowing that in that future the miasmas of to-day shall be absorbed, and that in the brighter light of those days the race shall still continue, overcoming such obstacles as the future is bound to bring with it, onward, upward, even as it is moving onward and upward to-day.

Therefore, although the present times may seem to us unlovely; although an apparent materialism may discomfort us and incline us to weaken in the fight, there is in reality no reason for such faint-heartedness. It is no longer a meditative age, but one of action, of accomplishment, of the dispelling

of fears born of superstition,—an age of regeneration. We know that we are still far distant from the summit of time; but the air we breathe is rarer, diviner; and while it is making us more conscious of the divine within us it is also making us more human, more conscious of the fact that each of us is but a link in the endless chain between Then and that other Then when again we shall be ourselves and when, in the performance of higher duties, it may no longer be necessary for us to remember that we were ever here.

OF the continuity of life after death much has been written, and, in the course of the ages, much is yet to be written. For what

purpose it is difficult to say, except, perhaps, because there must ever be many to whom the latest word is the newest truth. Certain of us maintain that the consciousness of eternal life as natural law must be inborn, and that some are surer of it than are others. Consciousness of annihilation is beyond the demonstration of the subtlest mind; yet when at the last the few remaining survivors of the race (allowing the possibility of such an event) await the final disintegration of the world, it is certain that, even as to-day and even as yesterday, there will be those who doubt and those whose reliance will be placed in the flaming words of Christ: "I am the Resurrection, and the Life. He that believeth in

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

In other words, the faith in man shall convince him of eternal verities.

The fact that we were alive yesterday and that we enjoy to-day should convince us of what we call Immortality. Time and Space existed long before man appeared upon the scene. They were not created for him, but, rather, he for them. The endlessness of the one and the boundlessness of the other are for the development of the spirit, which is deathless. Let us but assure ourselves of identity with that which was formerly considered separate from us; let us feel that we are bound by ties, however slight, with the Divine, and we shall

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

soon see how impossible it is for there to be an end to life, or even a severing of our connection with it.

How can there be an end to life? It is the divine mood made manifest. The tree is of no less consequence than the man; the tiny insect, busied about its own occupations, is of no less importance in the consideration of the Eternal than is the inventor, the organizer of social systems, or the poet. Place yourself at the altitude of the star and compare your three score years and ten with the hoar antiquity of the rocks. Thus, far removed in thought from the earth and man's way of estimating things, you shall comprehend, although but faintly, how all that is, how all that ever was,

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

is but a temporary expression of something to be finally re-expressed. Eternally changing, and of infinite variety, Life is the other name for God. And death is neither the cessation nor is it the beginning of things. It is merely a natural phase through which living forms must pass on the way to ultimate perfection. To feel assured of this, basing assurance on the fact that every thing changes continually, while nothing is ever lost, there is absolutely no proper cause for our fear of death. The Buddhists say: "Being born I am dead." Let us reverse this and say: "Being dead I am born." That after-condition which can contain within itself so gentle a thing as the "soul" of a

butterfly, will surely be unable to prove hurtful to the dominant soul of man!

Whether we lean to the purely materialistic or the purely spiritual conception of things, undeniable it is that there is a force of some kind which dominates all. This force is absolute and eternal, because it is ultimate. Our subconsciousness, the soul, is a spark of the Ultimate Force, and when a being reaches the degree of consciousness it may be said he has a "soul." The self-consciousness of the soul is the consciousness of our very being itself, and its destruction could take place only by the annihilation of that which is Imperishable, which is God, which is unthinkable;

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

for are not we part of the Eternal?

And once again let us assure ourselves that our progress is not along material lines only. For thereby we would be judged. The spiritual is back of every manifestation of intelligence, and have not we accomplished more in fifty years than has heretofore been accomplished in all the centuries? To the thoughtful minded, the most utilitarian inventions are as wonder-waking as the immortal conceptions of the artist or the sculptor. While we are prone to think that the former marvels are the distinctive manifestations of our genius, let us not forget that to us must also be accredited the broader and kindlier interpretation of the Book of Books,

the warmer sympathy and fellowship between rich and poor, and ever-increasing leniency to the sinner. For centuries, spirituality has been associated ever with individual condition; in our day, the betterment of the masses is a constant proof of our recognition of, and unification with, the Divine.

Knowing this, we of To-day need have no fear for To-day. The poet does not fear, for it is he who foresees all things. To him the city's roar is no less prophetic than is the wind-song upon the hilltops, and the constant yearning of humanity for God is as apparent to his eye as is the movement of the flower in the direction of the life-giving sun. He knows that in all phenomena is

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

the promise of life, not only of life for the short period of years accorded us, but life for all time. He is indeed a safe leader, for his forecastings have come true. One by one, like the beads of a told rosary, the poet has prophesied great things to come; and with no uncertain voice he has assured us that another existence is to follow this.

The One remains!

More constant than the Pole Star by which the mariner steers across tempestuous seas is He at whose bidding the waters surge and toss; and it is upon that constancy that our faith is founded. Not individuals only, but entire races slip into the night, and with them their beliefs and their religions. Awaiting

them is ever the One and His ultimate Truth.

The innumerable host whose bodily afflictions have prevented a keen enjoyment of the day's delight shall pass on, and awaiting them is ever the One and His ultimate Truth.

Those upon whom Sorrow has laid pale hands, who walk with Grief and in this life are not to be comforted, shall pass on, and awaiting them is ever the One and His ultimate Truth.

And those who through error or adversity sinned and fell, they that doubted, and even they that disbelieved, shall pass on, and awaiting them is ever the One and His ultimate Truth.

Our firm belief in the life that is to

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

be need not prevent us from enjoying the good things of this which is. Who, passing through a garden of beautiful flowers, even though his business lie beyond the Gate, would not tarry a while and partake of the innocent allurements around him? And life is such a garden, a garden becoming more beautiful year by year through the ministrations of noble men and women whose goal is beyond the Gate, where waits ever the One and His ultimate Truth.

And the finer things of life, whose enjoyment prepares us for what is to follow, what are they? Let each of us do cheerfully to-day whatever work is given him to do, endeavoring to live up to the expectations of

generous-minded friends. Let each of us cultivate gentleness, kindness, courtesy, and consideration; then, however limited the sphere in which we have our being, we shall see the world become better for our presence, and we shall have an influence for good not only on the individual, but on the race. The moment we cease to strive we become self-satisfied and unserviceable. High aims will carry us over difficult places, and thousands will eagerly follow. Let us sound the true note, that those about us may drink in the music as the thirsting sands absorb the singing sea. Sincere and strong, as we pay our tribute to Time we shall face unflinchingly the future; we shall become a part of creation's

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

endless harmony, and shall be given expression after death. And seeing that the material and the spiritual are so closely allied, let us endeavor to become good by doing good.

Let us labor joyously, and let us love our fellows; for love is older than life itself. It brooded over the creation of land and water from chaos, foreseeing impermanency. The lover when first he knows he is beloved, the mother beside the cradle, the friend beside the tried and trusted friend, all experience an emotion akin to that which is bestowed upon the birth of a world or the vanishing of a star. Not until we love do we become aware of the purposes of creation, nor can we in any way add to the divine

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

harmony. Love is the light that dispels all fear of the descent to death; it is one of the jewels that tremble eternally in the beneficent hand of God.

Let us be brave in adversity, humble in success, and true under all conditions. Let us have faith in ourselves and faith in our fellowmen. The vault of heaven is sometimes clouded; there is no nature so eternally beautiful as the soul would have it. But behind all storm is the sapphire serenity, and behind the most perverse of moods the predominant impulses of affection and love.

Seeded with stars, as the sphere whereon we now find ourselves is starred with flowers, the limitless

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

reaches of the heavens allure us onward and promise us the ultimate Resurrection.

There is no reason to fear, neither is there cause to doubt. Into the cool, dark bosom of the earth, whereto are gathered the curled leaves whose trembling heralded the approach of Spring, whose stillness reminded us of the quiescent happiness of Summer, whose rustling foretold the stealthy advance of Autumn, we must descend ere long. Let us go courageously. There our dust shall be welcomed by all that has ever lived, by all that has ever loved; but the spirit, the true self, can no more be imprisoned beneath the soil than can the fragrance of the violet or the rose. Those

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

fragrances, along with the souls of us, shall continue in eternal ascension; and we who have endeavored and enjoyed, shall endeavor and enjoy forever.

The setting sun, a purple sea;
A shaft of golden light
That strikes the hill tops, and, to me
Hints dawn-burst after night.

Fear not, my Soul, the gray of death,
The still, uncharted main;
The Light shall find thee, and the breath
Of God be thine again.

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